Library of
Hidden Knowledge

edited by Ruth L. Miller

As We Think, So We Are

James Allen's Guide to Transforming Our Lives

including

As a Man Thinketh • Light on Life
Above Life's Turmoil

VISIT…

Introduction

James Allen was born in Leicester, England, on November 28, 1864. His working-class family included his two younger brothers, his mother, who could neither read nor write, and his father, who worked in a factory operating a knitting machine for a living. Theirs was a comfortable life, if poor and uneventful. There was no hint in those early years of the upcoming events that would usher the young Allen into a world of prosperity thinkers. There was no sign that he would ultimately develop a prolific writing career that would launch a new movement, changing the way people everywhere see and perceive themselves today.

Growing Up Fast

In the late 1870s, when Allen was still a young boy, the textile trade of central England dropped into severe depression. To find work and establish a new home for the family, his father William took what little money they had and traveled to America. Like most men in that position, he intended to send for the rest of the family later.

Sadly, tragedy struck almost immediately. Within two days of William's arrival, he was pronounced dead at New York City Hospital, believed to be the victim of robbery and murder. (This period is illustrated

in the Martin Scorsese film *Gangs of New York*.) An empty pocketbook and an old silver watch were the only items found on his body.

So, at age fifteen, James was forced to drop out of school and find work to support his mother and two younger brothers. He started out as a common laborer in a local textile factory, working the same type of stocking-frame knitting machine that his father had operated before him, but Allen's ability to write and organize his ideas caught the attention of the factory's owner, who made Allen his private secretary.

This was a whole new world—a world based on thought rather than labor—and the young James Allen blossomed in it. Although he worked long hours at the office to help keep the family afloat (a workweek was six days, ten hours a day), he still found time to read and study. In fact, he turned out to be a real literary animal and, around the age of seventeen, he discovered Shakespeare, his first literary love: "I read Shakespeare in the early morning, at breakfast time, in the dinner hour, and in the evening," he was once quoted as saying.[1]

Then he discovered Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American writer whose transcendentalist prose lifted Allen into a higher realm of mind than he'd experienced in the dramas based on pain and suffering in Shakespeare's fiery passions and fleeting pleasures. He was deeply impressed by the essays "Compensation" and "The Over-Soul," but it was in "Self Reliance," that he found the idea that worth and dignity are a potential in everyone's character—to be developed through carefully considered thought and action. We see glimmers of Emerson's style throughout Allen's works later on.

Emerson's writings also introduced Allen to the poetry and literature of the East, which captured Allen's imagination and opened up new spiritual possibilities. At about the age of twenty-four, Allen read *The Light of Asia* by Sir Edwin Arnold, an epic poem about an imaginary Buddhist monk who symbolizes the life, character, and philosophy of Prince Gautama of India, the founder of Buddhism. Of all the works of poetry he absorbed in those early years, from Whitman to Milton, it was Sir Arnold's that led to Allen's spiritual metamorphosis. Describing his experience the first time he read *Light of Asia*, Allen wrote

> I could not stir from my seat till I read every word. When I did rise from the reading of this book, it was as though I had become a different man. A curtain seemed to have rolled back from the face of the Universe, and I saw the causes and meaning of things which had hitherto been dark mysteries. There was a revelation which was almost blinding in its brilliance and suddenness, an exaltation which alarmed me while it transported me into a felicitous insight. The vision quickly faded, but its influence remained, the memory of it saving me in many an hour of darkness and temptation.[2]

A "different man," Allen continued his journey into the literary realms of Eastern thought. By the age of twenty-six he had devoured the Bhagavad Gita, the Tao Te Ching, and various books by Chinese sages such as Confucius, as well as the *Gospel of Buddha*, by Paul Carus, and Dr. Richard M. Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind*.

Finding His Voice

In 1893 the ambitious and now-empowered Allen moved to London for a new job, and soon a new life started falling into place. He met Lily Louisa Oram, and they married in 1895. Their daughter, Nora, was born the following year, and a year after that, Allen began to work for a magazine called *The Herald of the Golden Age*, supplementing his income and developing his writing and editing skills as well as his spiritual and social interests.[3]

After a couple of years with *The Herald*, Allen had learned what he needed and collected enough material to write and publish the first of many books, *From Poverty to Power* (1901). This book was so well received that in 1902 Allen broke away from *The Herald* and launched his own spiritual magazine, *The Light of Reason*. Each issue of *The Light* contained announcements, an editorial written by Allen, and many articles, poems, and quotes by popular authors of the day and even local unknown authors.

Later that same year Allen published his most famous work, *As a Man Thinketh*. It was a mouse of a book that roared around the world, solidifying Allen's place as one of the pioneering figures of modern inspirational thought. Allen is said to have been at first dissatisfied with the book, even though it most concisely embodied his thought. His wife was the one to recognize its value and persuaded him to publish it.

With the success of *As a Man Thinketh*, Allen started earning enough to allow him to leave the urban world of business and move his work and family to the quiet Victorian seaside town of Ilfracombe, England. There the Allens would live for the next decade in a small home called *Bryngoleu* (a Welsh term meaning "Hill of Light") located on a winding lane nestled against the picturesque green hillsides overlooking the Celtic Sea. It was in this scenic and peaceful place that Allen wrote most of his letters, books, and articles, far from the cramped urban jungle of his working-class childhood in Leicester.

Living the Light

Allen's day in Ilfracombe began with a predawn walk to the Cairn, a locally famous pile of stones on the hillside overlooking his home and the sea. There he would remain for an hour or so in meditation. Then he would return to the house and spend the morning working on something for his magazine or writing one of his many books. Afternoons were devoted mostly to gardening, a pastime he enjoyed and, like Emerson, one he believed was part of a healthy life. His evenings were spent in conversation with the many people who came to visit because they were interested in his work.

Bryngoleu was the perfect environment for Allen, and it was here that his writing really took off. His books and the magazine were reaching readers throughout the world, in America, Australia, New Zealand, and India. Letters poured in from all over; they came in so fast that, for a short time Allen produced nothing but responses to these requests for information and support.

In an effort to meet this growing need, Allen established the Brotherhood, which was also called the School of Virtue, in 1905. The

central doctrine of the Brotherhood is what we call Oneness in the adapted text: the practice of unconditional love toward all beings through the renunciation of the small, egoic self for the good of the world. Groups met regularly in various countries, and a report of their meetings was printed each month in Allen's magazine under the heading "Our Groups and Their Work." Allen and his wife often traveled to group meetings to give talks and read articles.

People would come from around the world—English, French, Austrian, and Indian—to visit the Allens at Bryngoleu, so the Allens ran their home as a salon of intellectuals, where they would talk with their guests late into the evening on topics ranging from meditation and philosophy to the life and ideas of Tolstoy or Buddha.

A Literary Legacy

Allen stayed in Ilfracombe, writing for the magazine and producing one or two books per year until his death at the age of forty-seven years in 1912. He had written a total of nineteen books in all, some of which his wife published after he had passed on.

The exact cause of Allen's death is not known, but we do know that his body was cremated. His brother Thomas, who was also a writer and sometimes contributor to Allen's monthly journal, scattered his brother's ashes in the cemetery surrounding the crematorium with a blessing:

> As these ashes of James Allen are cast to the four winds of Heaven, so may the Truth he taught permeate to the four corners of the earth, carrying with it Joy, Peace, and Consolation.[4]

There was no formal funeral. Survived by his wife and their daughter, Allen left everything to Lily and named her and Thomas executors of his estate.

Allen seems to have died a happy man. He never became rich in the material sense, but the wealth he sought was beyond measure. We become spiritually rich, he believed, when we discover the power

within, when we are conscious of the Oneness of all life, when we practice discernment, self-discipline, and meditation, and when we experience kinship with others and with nature. Then, he found, all that we ever need or desire is available to us.

Lily continued spreading her husband's works, and published their magazine under the name *The Epoch* for several more years. She continued to run Bryngoleu as a guesthouse and also wrote books of her own. She summarized her husband's literary mission in the preface to one of these books, *Foundation Stones to Happiness and Success*.

> He never wrote theories, or for the sake of writing; but he wrote when he had a message, and it became a message only when he had lived it out in his own life, and knew that it was good. Thus he wrote facts, which he had proven by practice.[5]

A small, reserved man with unruly, flowing black hair and gentle eyes, Allen made a lasting impression on people he encountered. He had a gentle nature and, with the Hindu/Buddhist concept of reverence for life, advocated killing nothing, not even a mouse in the garden.

He strove to live the life that the Essenes of Jesus's time had advocated and that Leo Tolstoy and later Mohandas K. Gandhi encouraged: a life of voluntary simplicity, with daily manual labor and ongoing management of the mind. Though raised Methodist, he drew inspiration from many religions and influenced the leaders of the Church of England (the Anglican/Episcopalian denomination) in a way that was made visible in the works of his great friend, Archdeacon Wilberforce. Like Tolstoy, Benjamin Franklin, and the great teachers before them, Allen always sought to improve himself, to rid his thought and action of anything harmful, to embody all that was good and true, and to be happy. He once wrote

> Confucius said, "The perfecting of one's self is the fundamental base of all progress and of all moral development." A maxim as profound and comprehensive as it is simple and

> practical, and uninvolved, for there is no surer way to knowledge, nor better way to help the world than by perfecting one's self. Nor is there any nobler work or higher science than that of self-perfection.[6]

Allen generally disliked publicity, and it may be because of his disregard for flashy advertisement that he's not as well-known as some. But his many books are a monument to his memory. He was strong, true, and individual, a man who wrote and spoke out of the depth of his own convictions—an intellectual who thought from the heart.

Modernizing James Allen's Language

As a British author writing at the turn of the twentieth century, James Allen used the flowery prose of his age. On top of that, many of his words no longer exist in common use or their meanings have been lost or changed over the years.

The most obvious change made to this modern adaptation of James Allen is demonstrated in the title of the first piece, *As We Think*, which we changed from *As a Man Thinketh*. Of course, Allen's gender-specific language was just a part of the writing style back then. When we look deeper, we realize that Allen's message applies to all women and men and to people of all walks of life and levels of consciousness.

Yet, as distracting as his original style can be at times, the real gems of Allen's philosophy and method are still powerfully presented in his masterful prose. He had a special way of turning a phrase and distilling truth that makes you think in a new way at first and then you immediately see the wisdom. Like Emerson, he was a philosopher-poet who wrote in a direct and universal style that expressed his thoughts powerfully and gave his work a special niche.

His was the perfect voice for a whole new movement of thought in a world headed toward the Atomic Age. There are times when his words sometimes eerily match the wisdom or happenings of today, as if what he's talking about has been ripped from the headlines. For example, in *Light on Life*, he wrote

> The world is in a condition of mental ferment. Contradiction has reached the point of confusion, so that the earnest seeker for Truth can find no solid rock of refuge in the opposing systems which are presented.

These words applied in his day and are compelling in our world today. This was his reason for writing—to help everyone, everywhere, to be freed from undue stress and worry.

When we look at what Allen said about the power of the mind and the impact of thoughts, we also find that it's directly in line with modern discoveries in neurology. Through the use of brain scans, it's been shown that when a thought is produced and repeated; it literally grows and strengthens new neural pathways, which, over time, leads to a new filter for interpreting our perceptions.

Allen also showed the connection between the mind and the body. In *As We Think*, he wrote

> Sickly thoughts express themselves through a sickly body. Fear has been known to kill a person as speedily as a bullet, and fearful thoughts are continually killing thousands of people just as surely, though less rapidly. The people who live in fear of disease are the people who get it. Anxiety compromises and weakens the body, and lays it open to the entrance of disease; while fearful, attacking, or lustful thoughts, even if not physically indulged, will soon shatter the nervous system.

These words read like a description of psychosomatics and could be part of the definition of the developing field of psychoneuroimmunology. In essence, science and medicine are only now establishing the experimental validity of what he understood philosophically more than a century ago.

When we finally work our way through all the antiquated language, Allen's words lead us through the realms of political and social behavior, neurology, and physiology. His works distill the essential teachings of the

ancient schools and bring them into the early twentieth century. He made those teachings his own and shared them from his personal experience, using a poet's skill to bring his points clearly home.

We've made every attempt to honor his particular style while bringing his language into modern usage. We hope that these adaptations will bring his amazing wisdom into the twenty-first century. We hope you enjoy them and find them as useful as so many have before.

How to Use This Book

This book includes three of Allen's works. To help you keep track of their respective philosophies, each chapter in the first part—the "Interpretations"—closes with a summary of essential points, along with any notes on the text. And each of the three books ends with exercises you can use immediately to start implementing Allen's methods with tangible and practical spiritual results.

As with all the books in the Library of Hidden Knowledge series, the author's original version of the texts appears at the back of the book. For the most powerful experience, we recommend that you look over the whole book first, taking in what leaps off the page, wherever it appears. Then go through the first chapter, the adaptation titled *As We Think*. Read it and try the exercise at the end. Then take a look at Allen's original text in the second part of the book, *As a Man Thinketh*. You'll find the original text much easier to read at this point, and you may even find that there's a particular phrase or description of Allen's that brings an idea into clearer focus. Do the same for each section of the book, Light on Life and To Rise Above, following up with its original in the back.

Used this way, this book will help you experience a greater, more satisfactory sense of self, a new power to achieve any worthwhile personal purpose, and a new ability to enjoy life's beauty and wonder.

• • •

> I dreamed of writing books which would help men and women, whether rich or poor, learned or unlearned, worldly or

unworldly to find within themselves the source of all success, all happiness, accomplishment, all truth. And the dream remained with me, and at last became substantial; and now I send forth these books into the world on a mission of healing and blessedness, knowing that they cannot fail to reach the homes and hearts of those who are waiting and ready to receive them . . . who are eager to learn, and earnest to achieve . . . who will put away (for the world's good) a petty personal indulgence, a selfish desire, a mean thought, . . . without craving and regret.[7]

—James Allen

As We Think

Mind is the master power that molds and makes,
And we are mind, and evermore we take
The tool of thought, and, shaping what we will,
Bring forth a thousand joys, a thousand ills—
We think in secret, and it comes to pass:
Environment is but our looking glass.

—James Allen

Introduction: We Make Ourselves

This brief overview, the result of meditation and experience, is not intended as an exhaustive explanation of the power of thought. Its purpose is not to explain but to inspire humanity to the discovery and understanding of the truth that

We are the makers of ourselves by virtue of the thoughts we choose and encourage;

Mind is the master weaver of both the inner garment of character and the outer garment of circumstance;

And as we may have until now woven in ignorance and pain, we may now weave in enlightenment and happiness.

James Allen

1

Thought and Character

The idea, "As we think in our hearts, so we are," not only embraces our whole being but reaches out to all our conditions and circumstances. We literally are what we think and our lives are the product of our thoughts.

As the plant springs from the seed—and could not exist without it—so every one of our actions springs from the hidden seeds of our thoughts and could not have appeared without them. Even those actions we call "spontaneous" and "unpremeditated"—as well as those we've carefully and intentionally executed—are, and can only be, products of our thought.

And if action is the flower of thought, then joy and suffering are its fruits. We reap the sweet and bitter fruit that we sow, because what we've become was built with our thoughts. If our thoughts are fearful and hateful, trouble and distress will cloud our paths, but if our thoughts are peaceful and loving, focused on the higher Truth, bliss and blessedness follow us as surely as our shadows follow us on a sunny day.

We either make or unmake ourselves; we either forge the weapons that destroy us or make the tools to build heavenly mansions of joy, strength, and peace. With considered choice and the application of true thought, we ascend to divine perfection, while by the abuse and

unprincipled application of thought, we descend below the level of animals. Between these two extremes are all the grades of character, and we are their makers and rulers.

We develop, therefore, by the natural laws of cause and effect, and these laws are as absolute and unchanging in the hidden realm of thought as they are in the world of visible and material things. If someone is gracious and godlike, it's not because they're favored or lucky; it's the natural result of their continued compassionate thinking, the effect of their long-cherished focus on high principles and godly qualities. Similarly, if someone is mean and coarse, it's the result of their continued dwelling on mean and coarse thoughts.

Of all the beautiful truths that have been restored and brought to light in this age, none will promise you more joy and blessedness in mind and spirit than this—that you are the master of your thoughts, the molder of your character, and the maker and shaper of your condition, your environment, and your destiny. As a being of power, intelligence, and love and the controller of your own thoughts, you hold the key to every situation; you contain within yourself all the means to make yourself and your life what you will.

We're always in charge of our thoughts and actions, even in our weakest and most abandoned states, when we sometimes think and act foolishly. But when we can reflect on our condition and search diligently for the laws of cause and effect that govern our being, it's possible to discover them within ourselves. Then we become wise, directing our energies with intelligence and managing our thoughts for desired results.

This discovery is totally the result of attention, self-analysis, and experience. As gold and diamonds are obtained through much searching and mining, we can find every truth connected with our being if we're willing to dig deep into the mine of our own minds.

We watch, control, and change our thoughts, tracing their effects in our lives and circumstances. Then we link cause and effect by patient practice and investigation, considering all our experiences, even the most trivial, as a way to gain knowledge of our self. This is the only way

that the absolute law—"Everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7–8)—works. For only with patience, practice, and persistence can the door to the temple of knowledge be unlocked.

Essential Points

- Every one of our actions springs from the hidden seeds of thought and could not have appeared without them.
- We are the masters of our thoughts, the molders of our character, and the makers and shapers of our condition.
- As beings of power, intelligence, and love and the controllers of our own thoughts, we hold the key to every situation.
- We can find every truth connected with our being if we're willing to dig deep into the mine of our own minds.

2

The Effect of Thought on Circumstances

We can describe the mind as a garden that may be carefully cultivated or allowed to run wild. Whether cultivated or neglected, however, it must grow—and it will. If no useful seeds are planted, then useless weeds will grow instead of the desired flowers and fruits, and they will continue to intrude and produce their kind.

Just as gardeners cultivate their plots, keeping them free from weeds and growing the flowers and fruits they require for sustenance, we can tend the gardens of our minds. We do so by weeding out all the harmful, useless, and unhealthy thoughts and cultivating the flowers and fruits of good, useful, and loving thoughts. It's our decision: we are the master gardeners of our minds, the directors of our lives.

Thinking of the mind as a garden helps us understand how the forces and elements of the mind work to shape character, circumstances, and destiny. Everyone is where they are by the law of their being; there's no element of chance in the arrangement of our lives—it's all the result of natural law.

The thoughts you've built into your character have brought you to where you are today, for thought and character are one. And the outer conditions of your life will always harmoniously reflect your inner state,

since everyone's character is manifest and discovered through his or her environment and circumstance.

This doesn't mean that circumstances at any given time provide a full image of someone's entire character. It means, instead, that our current circumstances are so intimately connected with some vital element of recent thought patterns that the circumstances of the moment are essential for our development.

This is just as true for those who feel "out of harmony" with their surroundings as for those who are content with them. We're only distressed by circumstances as long as we believe ourselves to be creatures of outside conditions. But when we realize that we command the hidden soil and seeds out of which our circumstances grow, we become the rightful rulers of ourselves and our situations.

Those who have managed their thoughts and actions for any length of time know this truth. They can see changes in their environment in direct proportion to the changes in their mental condition. Once they start to seriously release and replace the thoughts and beliefs that no longer serve them, they go through a rapid series of changes in their lives.

This is because people don't attract what they want but they attract what they are. Their whims, fancies, and ambitions may be thwarted at every step or may be attained, but their innermost thoughts and desires manifest daily. We don't get what we wish and pray for but what we earn by the focus of our thoughts. Our wishes and prayers are only gratified and answered when they harmonize with our thoughts and actions.

We all reach the height of our highest hopes and fall to the level of our lowliest thoughts in the world, for our circumstances are the means by which we receive our own. And this is because we each attract what we secretly hold true—what we love as well as what we fear.

Every seed of thought that's sown or allowed to fall into the mind and take root there blossoms sooner or later into action, bearing its own fruit in opportunity and circumstance—good thoughts bearing good fruit, and bad thoughts producing bad fruit. For example, people don't end up in the poorhouse or jail by fate or circumstance but by their

own lowly thoughts and base desires. Nor does a normally principled person fall suddenly into crime by external force; the criminal thought has to be secretly fostered in the heart for some time before the hour of opportunity reveals its power. Descending into vice and its consequent sufferings can't happen without vicious inclinations in the mind, while ascending into pure happiness can't happen without continually cultivating worthy aspirations.

So we see that circumstances don't make us; in fact, they reveal us to ourselves. Good thoughts and actions can never produce bad results; bad thoughts and actions can never produce good results. This is simply saying that nothing can come from corn but corn and nothing from nettle seeds but nettles. It's a law in the natural world, and we're best served to work with it in the mental and moral world, though few understand how it applies and therefore don't benefit from it.

Aware that we're the reapers of our own harvests, though, we learn from both suffering and bliss. As improving and evolving beings, we are where we are so that we may learn and grow, and as we learn the spiritual lesson that any situation holds for us, the situation passes away, leaving room for other circumstances. So both pleasant and unpleasant external conditions are factors leading to our ultimate good.

The "divinity that shapes our ends," then, is the collection of healthy and unhealthy thoughts within ourselves—our very self. Thought and action can be both the jailers of fate and the angels of freedom. If they're low-minded or hostile, they imprison; if they're high-minded and just, they liberate. Ultimately, we decide whether or not to handcuff ourselves to our own selves.

As the controllers and rulers of our thoughts, therefore, we are the makers of ourselves, the shapers and authors of our environments and destinies—from birth, when the soul comes into form, and through every step of our lives on earth. The soul that we are attracts those combinations of conditions that reveal it, that reflect its own clarity and toxicity, strength and weakness.

The circumstances we encounter with suffering are always the result of our own mental discord, while the circumstances we appreciate and

bless are the measure of our continuing appreciative and praise-filled thoughts. Given this truth, why would we fight against circumstances? Most of us are continually rebelling against an effect that we ourselves have created, even while we're nourishing and preserving its cause in our hearts. That cause may take the form of a conscious choice or an unconscious weakness; but whatever it is, it makes our lives less than they could be, and so calls for remedy.

Applying the Laws of Thought

Most people are anxious to improve their circumstances, but many are unwilling to improve themselves—and remain imprisoned as a result. By contrast, those who don't shrink from overcoming the lesser self can never fail to accomplish their heart's intention. This is as true for worldly things as for heavenly ones. Even if your sole object is to acquire wealth, you must be prepared to make great personal sacrifices, to let go of unproductive patterns of thinking and habits of acting, before you can accomplish your objective.

Consider people who are poor and want very much to improve their surroundings and home comforts yet shirk their work, considering themselves justified in trying to deceive their employers because of their low wages. These people don't understand the simplest principles of true prosperity. They're not only totally unfit to rise out of their poor conditions but are actually attracting to themselves still deeper wretchedness by dwelling in—and acting out—lazy, deceptive, and cowardly thoughts.

Consider wealthy folk who are the victims of a painful and persistent disease as the result of gluttony. They would pay lots of money to get rid of their disease yet will not sacrifice their gluttonous desires. They may have money but have not yet learned the first principles of a healthy life. They can't continue indulging in large quantities of rich and unnatural foods and have good health, too.

We can also consider CEOs who avoid paying living wages, and in the hope of making still larger profits, reduce their workers' benefits or stockholders' dividends. Such people are altogether unfit for prosperity.

And when they find themselves bankrupt in both reputation and riches, they blame the circumstances, not understanding that they've been the sole authors of their condition.

These three cases merely illustrate the truth that people are the cause (though nearly always unknowingly) of their circumstances. That, while aiming for a desirable end, they continually frustrate its accomplishment by encouraging thoughts and desires that can't possibly harmonize with that end. Such cases could be multiplied and varied almost indefinitely, but it's not necessary.

Each of us can trace the action of the laws of thought in our own minds and lives, but we can't usually see them at work until we've done so. And no one can do it for us. Individual circumstances are so complicated, thought is so deeply rooted, and the conditions of happiness vary so greatly that no one's entire condition (although it may be known to that individual) can be judged by anyone outside.

For example, one person may be generally honest yet still suffer hardship. Another may often be dishonest yet acquire wealth. The usual assumption that one fails because of honesty and the other prospers because of dishonesty is the result of an underlying belief that dishonest people are almost totally corrupt, while honest people are almost entirely virtuous. But with deeper knowledge and wider experience, this assumption is shown to be baseless. The dishonest person may have some virtues that the other lacks, while the honest one may hide vices that the other abhors. The honest reap the good results of their honest thoughts and actions as well as the sufferings their vices produce. The dishonest likewise reap their own mixture of suffering and happiness.

It's normal in our culture to think that people suffer because they're virtuous. But only if we've completely uprooted every sickly, bitter, and fearful thought from our minds and washed every stain of the past from our souls can we know and declare that our suffering is the result of our good qualities. And as we do so, we will find the great Law working in our minds and lives. That Law is absolutely just and cannot give good for evil or evil for good, so we'll know, looking back upon our past

ignorance and blindness, that all our past experiences, good and bad, were simply the reflection of our evolving but not yet evolved self.

In fact, any form of suffering is always the effect of misguided thought. It's an indication that we're out of harmony with ourselves and with the Law of our being. The sole and supreme use of suffering is to burn out whatever is useless and toxic in our thoughts and memories. Suffering ceases for those who are perfectly clear and enlightened; after all, there's no point in burning gold after the impurities have been removed.

Misery, not lack of material possessions, is therefore the best measure of misguided thought. Misery has two extremes: destitution and indulgence. They're equally unnatural, and both are the result of disordered thinking. In general, people may be either miserable and rich or blessed and poor. The rich are only blessed when the riches are lovingly and wisely used, and the poor only descend into misery when they regard their lack of riches as a burden.

We can be sure we're not in our right minds until we're happy, healthy, and prosperous. And happiness, health, and prosperity are the result of a harmonious relationship between our happy, healthy, prosperous thoughts and our surroundings. They come when the whining and criticizing stop and the search for the hidden process that regulates life begins. Then, as we adapt our minds to that regulator, we begin to stop blaming others for our conditions and build ourselves up with strong and principled thoughts. We cease to kick against circumstances and begin to use them as aids to more rapid progress, helping us discover the hidden powers and possibilities within ourselves.

Powers and Possibilities of Thought

Order, not confusion, is the dominating principle in the universe. Justice, not injustice, is the essence and substance of life. And uprightness, not corruption, is the molding and moving force in the spiritual government of the world.

This being so, we have but to set ourselves right to find that the universe is right. In the process of establishing ourselves in harmonious

alignment with the universal principle, we find that the world of our experience has changed. We see that as we change our thoughts about things and other people, those things and other people change in their attitudes and behaviors toward us.

So while we can't directly choose our circumstances, we can choose our thoughts and therefore, indirectly yet surely, shape our circumstances. And when we radically shift our thoughts, we experience a rapid transformation in the material conditions of our lives. When we cease from having cynical and fearful thoughts, the whole world softens toward us and is ready to help. When we put away weak and sickly thoughts, lo and behold, opportunities spring up everywhere to aid such strong resolve. When we encourage good thoughts, no hard fate could ever bind us to distress and shame.

Some imagine that thought can be kept secret, but it can't. It rapidly crystallizes into habit, and habit solidifies into circumstance, either blessed or miserable. Specifically,

- Fearful and misguided thoughts of every kind crystallize into debilitating and confusing habits, which solidify into distracting and adverse circumstances.
- Habits of drunkenness and sensuality solidify into circumstances of destitution and disease.
- Thoughts of fear, doubt, and indecision crystallize into weak, dishonorable, and indecisive habits, which solidify into circumstances of failure, indigence, and slavish dependence.
- Lazy thoughts crystallize into habits of disorder and dishonesty, which solidify into circumstances of foulness and destitution.
- Hostile and critical thoughts crystallize into habits of accusation and violence, which solidify into circumstances of injury and persecution.
- Selfish thoughts of all kinds crystallize into habits of self-seeking, which solidify into distressing circumstances.

On the other hand,

- Beautiful thoughts crystallize into habits of grace and kindness, which solidify into genial and sunny circumstances.
- Noble thoughts crystallize into habits of temperance and self-control, which solidify into circumstances of peace and rest.
- Thoughts of courage, self-reliance, and decision crystallize into strong and constructive habits, which solidify into circumstances of success, plenty, and freedom.
- Energetic thoughts crystallize into habits of cleanliness and effectiveness, which solidify into circumstances of pleasantness.
- Gentle and forgiving thoughts crystallize into habits of gentleness, which solidify into safe and healthy circumstances.
- Loving and unselfish thoughts crystallize into habits of doing good for others, which solidify into circumstances of sure and abiding prosperity and true riches.

The proof of this truth is in everyone. As William H. Murray and Ralph W. Emerson remind us, Nature helps everyone fulfill the thoughts that are most encouraged under its laws. The universe is constantly presenting us with opportunities that will most speedily bring both good and harmful thoughts to the surface of our awareness.[1]

This means that the world is your kaleidoscope, and the ever-changing combinations of colors it presents to you are the exquisitely adjusted pictures of your ever-moving thoughts.

You will be what you will to be;
Let failure find its false content
In that poor word, "environment,"
But spirit scorns it and is free.

It masters time, it conquers space;
It cows that boastful trickster, Chance,
And bids the tyrant Circumstance
Uncrown and fill a servant's place.

The human Will, that force unseen,
The offspring of a deathless Soul,
Can hew a way to any goal,
Though walls of granite intervene.

Be not impatient in delay,
But wait as one who understands;
When spirit rises and commands,
The gods are ready to obey.[2]

Essential Points

- Just as gardeners keep their plots free from weeds to grow the flowers and fruits they require for sustenance, we tend the gardens of our minds, weeding out all the useless and unhealthy thoughts and cultivating the flowers and fruits of noble, useful, and loving thoughts.
- Each of us attracts what we secretly hold true—what we love as well as what we fear.
- Happiness, health, and prosperity only come when the whining and criticizing stop and the search for the hidden balance that regulates all life is begun.
- The outer conditions of our lives always reflect our inner states, so circumstances don't make us; they reveal us to ourselves.
- As we change our thoughts about things and other people, those things and other people change in their attitudes and behaviors toward us.